

□ BIRMINGHAM - Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) called for completion of the Northern Beltline during an economic impact study briefing held in Birmingham today by the Birmingham Business Alliance and the Coalition for Regional Transportation. The following are his prepared remarks.

It is time to complete the Northern Beltline.□

There is no doubt a completed interstate loop around Birmingham will create jobs and transform this region. The fact is that most, if not all major metropolitan areas have an interstate loop.□

We've heard this morning what this could mean in terms of jobs and economic growth for our region.□ The Birmingham Business Alliance and the Coalition for Regional Transportation deserve credit for producing this study.□

Many mayors are in the room with us today, and I want to thank the more than 20 municipalities who recently have or are planning to pass resolutions in support of the Northern Beltline.□ For those of you who have not yet passed a resolution, I ask you to consider doing so.□

When companies look to locate, one of the first things they consider is the transportation system.□ The gridlock that we are all familiar in the Birmingham region is a drag on economic development, and the constant congestion is not good for public safety, air quality, or our peace of mind.□

You probably know that when the Interstate system was developed, Birmingham to Memphis was never in the original plan.□ Senator Shelby, Senator Roger Wicker when he was in the House, and I have worked for years to complete Corridor X, or I-22, and it is

almost finished. If you haven't driven to Memphis lately you should take a weekend trip to see the new interstate. It is a beautiful drive.

But there is a missing link and that is the Northern Beltline.

Funding for a project like this does not happen overnight. The process to get all of the needed designations is long and competitive. It's especially hard for a smaller state like Alabama.

By working together, we have added the Northern Beltline to the National Highway System and the Appalachian Highway System to qualify for federal funding. We changed the gas tax formula to bring more of our money back to Alabama.

Finally, the pieces are all in place. The funding stream is there through the Appalachian Development Highway System, and Senator Shelby and I are committed to making sure that Alabama receives what it is due.

We are entitled to \$117.5 million a year (\$147 million when you add the state match) for the Northern Beltline annually, and that will enable us to complete this road in twenty years.

But like all good things, there is a catch. If we don't demand action from state transportation officials, we'll lose any chance of getting the consistent level of funding needed to finish the road. The Beltline will have major gaps and Alabama will lose hundreds of millions of dollars in highway funding to other states. The time to act is now. The time to come together with a united message in support of the Northern Beltline is now.

The encouraging news is that in Birmingham and Jefferson County, I am seeing cooperation that many of us have said this area has needed for a long time.

With the support of the leaders we have in this room today, and the many others throughout our great region, I have faith that we will take advantage of this opportunity to build the Northern Beltline and reap the dividends in our community for decades to come.

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